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C O N F I D E N T I A L PARIS 006694

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/29/2015

TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [MOFS](#) [AF](#) [FR](#) [NATO](#)

SUBJECT: FRENCH WARY OF ISAF/OEF COMMAND PROPOSAL AND
CONCERNED ABOUT U.S. TROOP COMMITMENTS

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt, Reason 1
.4 B/D

11. (C) Summary. According to the MOD Policy Director, France can live with the NATO proposal for an ISAF/OEF integrated, but still dual-hatted command, so long as there is clear differentiation between the OEF and ISAF missions. It is for this reason that Defense Minister Alliot-Marie continues to speak of "synergy" (between two distinct operations) rather than integration. The French are also worried about U.S. long-term objectives in Afghanistan, concerned that the U.S. may be planning to reduce its troop levels in Afghanistan, in conjunction with an integrated ISAF/OEF command. There is a real fear that not only would NATO members have to fill in for departing U.S. troops, but that this could result in ISAF mission-creep to compensate for a decreasing OEF force. That said, France remains committed to ISAF, OEF, and training the Afghan army, and is proceeding with its plans to take over the Kabul regional command in conjunction with Turkey. End summary.

12. (SBU) Political Minister-Counselor and Poloff met September 21 with new MOD Director for Policy Jean de Ponton d'Amecourt to follow up on the Berlin informal defense ministerial meeting and to try to obtain clarification of French thinking in the context of Defense Minister Alliot-Marie's insistence that the dual-hatted commands be viewed as "synergy" rather than integration.

13. (C) According to Ponton d'Amecourt, France is going along with NATO planning for an integrated ISAF-OEF command. That said, Alliot-Marie's primary concern is that the ISAF and OEF operations be separate and distinct, and remain so. The French see it as essential that there be no confusion between counter-terrorism operations (OEF) and NATO's stabilization role (ISAF). Ponton d'Amecourt stated that, despite press reports to the contrary, Alliot-Marie had sought to avoid a confrontation on this issue at the Berlin informal ministerial. However, France still needed further clarification as to exactly how the combined, dual-hatted command would work in practice. While there are those in the GOF-- including the French CHOD General Bentegeat on September 19 -- who have cast Alliot-Marie's statements more in terms of semantics than substance, in fact this is not entirely the case.

14. (C) Ponton d'Amecourt emphasized that cooperation on the ground in Afghanistan between U.S. forces in OEF and ISAF was excellent. However, he said France remained concerned about U.S. long-term planning for Afghanistan, and in particular, that the U.S. was planning to downsize its troop presence once the combined ISAF/OEF command was put into place. This is a concern often voiced by our MFA contacts, as well. The French worry that a reduction in the U.S. presence would create two sets of problems for France. In the first instance, it would mean by definition that France, as a major contributor of forces at NATO, would be under pressure to bear a larger burden, at a minimum proportionately. French forces are already thinly stretched through their overseas commitments. In the second instance, they see a risk that the withdrawal of U.S. forces would lead to the temptation to try to compensate for smaller OEF forces through an expanded ISAF mandate. Alliot-Marie was putting down a marker against such mission-creep.

15. (C) On France's own commitment to Afghanistan, Ponton d'Amecourt noted that France was still planning to take over the ISAF Kabul command next year with Turkey, and that it would increase its troop deployments in Kabul to some 1,000 personnel in that context. In response to Pol MC's queries, Ponton d'Amecourt said France still had a problem with PRTs, as it believed the NATO presence in Afghanistan should focus on military roles and not on reconstruction and development efforts, which are the domain of assistance agencies. (Comment: The French want NATO to remain much more than a peacekeeping organization. End Comment.) Ponton d'Amecourt volunteered that MOD sensitivities on PRTs might also be linked to budgetary considerations, although this was not explicit MOD policy. The MOD would not want to be held responsible for funding (French) reconstruction work out of its own budget.

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